

# Being Ready With Confidence

1 Thessalonians 5

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Virtual Camp 2020 - May 25, 2020

## **Picturing the Real Whit Camp**

Wow, okay, this is a real pleasure to talk to everyone around the world today. I will admit that it's a slightly intimidating pleasure, but a pleasure nonetheless. From what Beth and I have seen and heard, it seems like everyone's had a really fantastic time fellowshiping, so a huge thanks to everyone that's put in to organising this weekend. This is a very special day for me, particularly because ever since I met Beth, I have always wanted to go to Whit Camp and here I kind of am. Woohoo!

Now let's see if I get this right. We're in the middle of a big field covered in that luscious English grass that you've got over there. It's of course, a sunny day with the blue sky. There are lots and lots of wonderful people milling about, kids running about making happy noises. Over to one side there is an outrageously high mountain of sticks being collected for a bonfire that would definitely be illegal in an Australian summer. To the other side there's a game of football going on with all of you Brits showing off your ridiculously good football skills, but I might add, it's very good to see that Mattie and Scottie are doing ourselves proud. In the middle of the field, there is a massive white tent, now I have to admit that I'm picturing the "British Bake-off" tent, but that's okay. And here we all are, I believe a very large number of us all, inside the white tent, sitting down for the exhortation. The emblems are on the table before us, and we are all fellowshiping together remembering Jesus.

Now I'm sure that we were all wishing that that was the case. But under the current circumstances, this is pretty good, isn't it? This is a real blessing. Speaking of the current circumstances,

this is a very unprecedented time, isn't it? You can almost picture the angels behind the scenes moving all of the chess pieces around the world, directing the events, lining things up so that everything is finally perfectly ready for Jesus to triumphantly return to his family, his brothers and sisters, who are *us*.

We're going to do a little bit of reading from First Thessalonians today, and we're going to start with four verses 16 to 18, from the NLT we read

*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the Arc-Angel and with the trump call of God. First the believers who have died will rise from their graves, then together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words.*

These are absolutely wonderful words aren't they brothers and sisters? That is what we are so desperately excited for every single day, especially now with what's going on.

But when brothers and sisters, when is this going to happen? We'll follow straight on, First Thessalonians 5.1-3, and Paul says:

*Now concerning how and when all this will happen dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write to you, for you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly like a thief in the night.*

## Jesus Might Return any Minute Now

Personally, I don't think there's anything scripturally left that has to happen before Jesus returns, and personally, I also don't think the world has to get any worse before Jesus returns, I like to think that he could return any day. He might not, it's God's will, but I want to expect it any day now because I want to be ready. If we hear what Jesus says in Matthew 22.44, he says:

*You also must be ready all the time for the son of man will come, when least expected.*

Well it's not really least expected now, is it? It's too obvious I hear you say, it's not going to be a thief in the night if he comes for us now, with all this going on. Let's keep reading First Thesalonians 5.4-6:

*But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the Day of the Lord comes like a thief, for you are all children of the light and of the day. So be on your guard, be ready, not asleep like the others, stay alert and be clear headed.*

Now these are **really** encouraging words, aren't they? We won't be surprised, we don't know when it's gonna happen, but we're not gonna be surprised when it happens. Now I said just before that I want to expect Jesus' return any day because I want to be ready.

## **Being Ready**

Being ready for Jesus' return, that's something that I want to still have a little bit of a think about. Jesus tells us the parable of the Wedding Feast where the guests who were ready when the groom comes are invited into the wedding feast. Remember the ones who had prepared had their lamps filled with oil. Now I almost hate to admit it, but there have been times in my life where, even though I was asking for Jesus to return soon in my prayers, maybe in the back of my head, I was secretly a bit fearful of it, thinking, 'well, maybe not yet, actually, because I'm now ready, I'm just not good enough.'

Now, I don't think I've really ever given it any clear conscious thought before this exhortation, this concept of being ready and whether I am, other than probably in the past, thinking in the back of my head, I really know I need to get ready and hopefully that will happen when I'm older and I'm a better person 'cause I'm not good enough now.

Well, interestingly, one of the positives that's come out of this whole Coronavirus debacle, shenanigans, whatever you want to call it... disaster. One of the things that's come out of it for me has been a real clarity about this concept of being ready for Jesus' return. Can I consider myself already? I never have before.

Now I can't remember what made me start doing this, but early on when Australia was hit, Beth and the kids were isolating, and I had to keep going out into big factories full of people from all over the world, most of whom looked like they didn't care about socially distancing or they didn't understand about socially distancing, and I was genuinely fearful of bringing the

virus home to the kids, especially our newborn Eden.

I started saying in my prayers, 'Lord, please, please send Jesus back today. Me and my family are ready.' I've never said that before in a prayer to God, I don't think I've ever said it out loud before, but do you know what? I've kept saying it because it's 100% true. I really do feel and believe that we are ready. Now good old Strong's Concordance tells us that the word ready in this parable in Matthew 25.10 (that's the parable of the virgins and the lamps in the oil) means to be prepared — ready means prepared — and one of the Bible usages for this word that Strong's talks about is being prepared to receive one's coming, and it says Matthew 25.10, and what we read before Matthew 24.44 (NLT) where Jesus said you [also] must be ready all the time. Strong says. This is about being prepared to receive one's coming.

I feel ready for Jesus' return because I feel prepared to receive Jesus and we'll talk about why in a sec, but saying to God, please send Jesus, we are ready, and saying every day and meaning it and believing it, has felt incredible, and interestingly I haven't had any feelings of fear of Jesus' return during the Coronavirus. I haven't even thought about fear it all to be honest, other than what's going on in the world.

Considering how close and real the current situation makes me think about Jesus' return, this is really interesting to me. I've just been very earnestly and excitedly praying for him to come back as soon as possible because we want it, and let's be honest, we really need it, and hopefully that's had an effect on Beth and the kids too, hearing those words. Words are very powerful brothers and sisters, you believe the words you speak if you

keep seeing them.

## **Be Bold**

Now how can I possibly be bold enough to say to God 'I'm ready for Jesus' return'. Let's just break this down a little bit, this is how I'm feeling about it. I'm ready because I'm praying for Jesus to return every day, I have for years, but especially now, and if we read Isaiah 62.6-7 from the NLT

*Take no rest all you who pray to the Lord, give the Lord no rest until he completes his work, until he makes Jerusalem the pride of the Earth.*

What a great concept. This is talking to the Israelites back in Old Testament times, but the concept applies to us too I'm sure. Give the Lord no rest, keep praying! I'm ready because I'm expecting Jesus any day and I'm watching the world every day and I'm seeing the signs that his return must be getting close. In Mark 13 we read a little parable from Jesus where he says:

*You don't know when the master of the household will return in the evening, at midnight, before dawn or a daybreak, I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him.*

I'm ready because I cannot wait for his return. I am so excited, so desperate for it that I pray every day that today is the day, and if we read Hebrews 9.28 this time from the NET:

*Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many, but to those who eagerly await him, he will appear a second time not to bear sin, but to bring salvation.*

Definitely eagerly awaiting. I'm ready because unlike Lot's wife, I'm ready to leave all of this as soon as he gets here. Yeah, we've got... things... and stuff, so much stuff, but you know what? I can't wait to leave it all behind. Matthew 6.19-21:

*Don't store up treasures here on Earth. Store your treasures in heaven. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.*

and I'm ready for Jesus' return because his return and his kingdom is my confident hope.

Romans 15.13

*I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope.*

## **Be Hopeful**

Now I apologise to some of the people in Melbourne. You've probably heard me say this a couple of times, but at the minute I am loving the definition of the word hope. The Greek word *elpis* in Strong's, is to anticipate, usually with pleasure, expectation, confidence, faith. Now doesn't that warm your heart brothers and sisters, to anticipate, with pleasure, expectation, confidence, faith?

But here's the big question:

Do I need to feel *good enough* to be so bold as to say I am ready for Jesus' return? And the answer is simple:

**No!**



No. I've finally realised that that fear that might have been in the back of my head when I was younger, no longer holds me back from telling God I am ready for Jesus' return today, because let's face it, if I need to feel good enough to be ready I am never going to be ready, and that feeling of relief is just another reason why I am so ready and so desperate for Jesus to return because I finally want to be able to give God the praise and the glory that he truly deserves for giving us his son because he's the only reason that we can be not good enough, and we can still have this wonderful confident hope because through Jesus our sins are forgiven — we are *justified* in God's sight.

Now that sentence is always struck me, that's impossible right? Being made right in God's sight, being justified in God's sight. But thankfully, we've got all things are possible. A couple of verses that are just really standing out to me. Second Tim 1.9 from the NLT

*For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, because that was his plan from before the beginning of time to show us his grace through Christ Jesus.*

and Romans 5.2:

*Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.*

That's funny, though, isn't it? Because we read these words and we nod and we agree, and we say, Yep, wow, that's amaz-

ing, but then, deep down, in the middle of the night, when we're thinking about it, do we actually believe they apply to us? And those are the kind of thoughts that can hold you back from feeling even remotely able to say, 'I am ready for Jesus' return.'

### **Be Humble and Faithful**

Along with the thoughts of being ready versus being good enough, I've been thinking a lot about the relationship between humility and faith now — understatement of the century — we are obviously incredibly humble before God aren't we? Psalms 8.3-4 say it so well, they say:

*When I look at the night sky and I see the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you set in place, what are mere mortals that you should think about them?*

Here's an interesting question brothers and sisters, that I've been pondering, and the answer could well be different for everyone. Is it possible to be so humble before God that we're not allowing ourselves some of the benefits that he has graciously given to us now while we wait for Jesus return. I'm not ready because I'm not good enough. Those lovely versus that James just read out about forgiveness and salvation, they can't ever apply to me because I'm not good enough. One of the songs that I wrote for this year's Dawn Chorus, which Alex has put together again like a champion, is called "I Want To Praise You," and in this song I explored this idea a little bit.

The song starts off by saying:

"Why is it so hard for us to believe your power to save?  
The most powerful force the world has ever seen is the life that

Jesus gave”

It’s easy to talk about and to celebrate the forgiveness that comes from Jesus’ sacrifice, but it can sometimes be hard to apply it to ourselves and really believe it, really feel its power wash over us and cleanse us and give us the energy that we all need. But brothers and sisters, the words are there in the Bible so many times, and this is another one of my favourite passages at the minute. Titus 3.4-7, again from the NLT, gives a good clarity:

*when God our Saviour revealed his kindness and love, he saved us not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and a new life through the Holy Spirit. Because of his grace, he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.*

and later in this Dawn Chorus song, I say:

“Please don’t let humility dent the power of your faith”

because you can be incredibly perfectly humble before God **and** have incredible faith in his love and the power of his son’s sacrifice at the same time. In fact, the more I think about it, for me personally I feel like those things go hand in hand, humility and faith.

So let’s bring this full circle. Let’s go back to First Thessalonians 5, we’re up to verse 8, and we read:

*Let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armour of faith and love, wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. For God chose to*

*save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.*

Isn't that last bit very, very apt for this weekend?

### **Say it Out Loud**

Brothers and sisters, I really recommend having a think about saying out loud that you are ready for Jesus' return. Believing that Jesus' sacrifice is more than powerful enough to forgive even your sins and mine, and having confidence in God's desire and ability to give even you and me salvation, and I'm sure that we're all anticipating the kingdom and Jesus' return with a lot of pleasure.

These thoughts are not being proud or presumptuous. I don't have any confidence in myself. I have complete confidence in Jesus and in God. God wants us to feel joy and comfort that He sent us His son on that there is a brilliant kingdom coming. But why would God do so much for us, we're mortal we're sinners? Why?

It's this question that can at times make these things difficult to apply to yourself. It doesn't make sense, why would God do this? But think of it like this: God offers us joy and comfort and confidence so that we can serve Him better, so that we can produce more fruit, so that we can give him more praise and glory, so that we can inspire others around us to praise God with our energy and our excitement.

## **Because God is Love**

It makes a huge amount of sense when you put it like that, doesn't it brothers and sisters? Talk about an undeserved privilege. Now I do have to say that not every day is full of joy and energy and excitement. But these gifts to us from God are also there to help us through the harder days. Because no matter what's going on, no matter how we feel, we *always* have Jesus to fall back on for help and strength and forgiveness, and we *always* have the kingdom to look forward to.

So let's keep building ourselves, building each other and encouraging each other up this weekend with these thoughts brothers and sisters and let's remember with joy and humility and faith our wonderful saviour Jesus Christ in the emblems before us and the wonderful things that these emblems give us access to *now* to help us in our walk together, waiting for Jesus' glorious return.

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*Jamie Wallace*